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New York

Provisional

President: Mr. Abushahab/Ms. Shaheen (United Arab Emirates)

Members:

Albania	Ms. Dautllari
Brazil	Mr. Sénéchal de Goffredo Junior
China	Mr. Dai Bing
Ecuador	Mr. Pérez Loose
France	Mrs. Broadhurst Estival
Gabon	Mr. Biang
Ghana	Ms. Oppong-Ntiri
Japan	Mrs. Shino
Malta	Ms. Gatt
Mozambique	Mr. Afonso
Russian Federation	Mr. Nebenzia
Switzerland	Mrs. Baeriswyl
United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland . .	Mr. Kariuki
United States of America	Mr. Wood

Agenda

The situation in the Central African Republic

Letter dated 26 May 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/383)

Report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic (S/2023/442)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Central African Republic

Letter dated 26 May 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council (S/2023/383)

Report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic (S/2023/442)

The President: In accordance with rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the representatives of Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic, the Republic of the Congo, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea and Rwanda to participate in this meeting.

On behalf of the Council, I welcome Her Excellency Ms. Sylvie Valérie Baipo Temon, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Francophonie and Central Africans Abroad of the Central African Republic.

In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite the following briefers to participate in this meeting: Ms. Valentine Rugwabiza, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Central African Republic and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic; Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, Executive Director of UN-Women; His Excellency Mr. Bankole Adeoye, African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security; and Mr. Rhosyns Ngatondang, Head of Association, Jeunesse en Marche pour le Développement en Centrafrique.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I wish to draw the attention of Council members to document S/2023/383, which contains the text of a letter dated 26 May 2023 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council, and document S/2023/442, which contains the report of the Secretary-General on the Central African Republic.

I now give the floor to Ms. Rugwabiza.

Ms. Rugwabiza: I would like to congratulate the United Arab Emirates on assuming the presidency of

the Security Council for the month of June, and I would also like to take this opportunity to thank you, Sir, for presiding over this meeting.

I am honoured to join Council members today to present the most recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/442) on the Central African Republic and update them on recent developments in the country. I will underscore the positive steps taken by the Government to advance the peace process, as well as the concerning security and humanitarian situation at Central African borders with the Sudan and Chad.

First, the good news is that important progress was made in the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and the joint road map for peace of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region in a harmonized manner, including at the local level. On 24 March, the Prime Minister convened a conference, in which all Central African prefects participated, to kick-start the decentralization of the implementation of the peace process, including by reactivating prefectural implementation mechanisms. I am also pleased to report that 28 April marked a significant development in the peace process, with the dissolution of two additional armed groups, which are signatories to the Political Agreement, and of factions of three other signatory armed groups, following active engagement by the Government of the Central African Republic with leaders of those armed groups. However, the residual combatants affiliated with the wings of those armed groups must be quickly disarmed and reintegrated for that dissolution to have a meaningful impact.

I would like to take this opportunity to urge the partners of the Central African Republic to provide additional support to the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration programme, as required for the effective reintegration of disarmed and demobilized armed elements. I would also like to welcome the Peacebuilding Fund's approval of \$5 million to support the socioeconomic reintegration of ex-combatants in the Central African Republic through a project that will be jointly implemented with by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and UN-Women. I further welcome the Peacebuilding Fund's approval of an additional \$3 million project last week in support of social cohesion between returnees and host communities, which will be implemented

by IOM and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

On 30 May, the President of the Central African Republic announced a referendum on a new constitution, scheduled for 30 July, with a campaign from 15 to 28 July. Subsequently, the National Elections Authority announced the temporary suspension of preparations for the local elections. Against that backdrop, I encourage the Government to provide clarification on its new calendar and timetable for local elections. The convening of local elections in the Central African Republic continues to represent a unique opportunity to help address the root causes of the conflict by advancing decentralization, promoting citizen-centred governance and consolidating the extension of State authority. Local elections would also broaden the political space, which is a priority of the Political Agreement. For local elections to have the required impact, they must be inclusive. I have therefore continued to encourage dialogue between the Government and the leaders of opposition political parties.

The reporting period also saw the extension of State authority to some of the most remote parts of the Central African Republic. A key milestone was in the area of Sam Ouandja, near the Sudan border, which had been under the control of armed groups for decades. Joint and integrated interventions by the national defence and internal security forces, in coordination with the uniformed and civilian components of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), allowed the resumption of humanitarian and development support in the area, thereby bringing tangible peace dividends to the local population.

Following the securing of the area and the re-establishment of State authority, the Prime Minister of the Central African Republic and myself led a joint visit to Sam Ouandja with a delegation composed of several ministers, United Nations country team agencies and bilateral and regional partners. During the visit, a number of transformative and people-centred projects were launched in the areas of health, education and community violence reduction, in addition to the launch of the UNDP stabilization programme in the Central African Republic. The ongoing transformation in Sam Ouandja shows that it is possible to break decades-long cycles of violence and conflict and re-establish State authority, even in regions known to have limited or no State presence.

However, that requires coordinated and concomitant interventions by the Government of the Central African Republic, MINUSCA and humanitarian and development partners. While the humanitarian needs of the Central African Republic remain significant and pressing, it is also necessary to support the Government to rebuild social cohesion and invest in the resilience and recovery of local communities. The Government's mobilization of the support of those partners to build the institutional, logistical and operational capabilities and capacities of the national defence and internal security forces also remains essential to sustain security gains.

The security situation, however, remains concerning in some parts of the country. The increasing tensions and rapidly deteriorating security conditions at the Central African Republic's borders with Chad, the Sudan and South Sudan since April, including throughout most of May, represent renewed security and humanitarian challenges. Those new threats have impacted the already complex security environment, requiring MINUSCA to maintain flexibility and mobility. In that context, MINUSCA requires sufficient and adequate aviation capabilities to maintain our preventive and robust posture. I also encourage the Government of the Central African Republic to take a holistic and coordinated approach to border management. I therefore welcome the Government's recent approval of a national policy on the management of border areas, and I urge the Government and neighbouring countries to continue addressing border management through the reactivation of their respective bilateral commissions.

Explosive ordnance devices continue to pose a significant threat to civilians, peacekeepers and humanitarian actors. MINUSCA continues its support to mitigate that threat in order to create a security environment that is conducive to effective humanitarian delivery in the country. I would like to express my appreciation to MINUSCA's troop- and police contributing countries, whose personnel continue to serve even in the face of hostile action, as shown last week by the injuring of two peacekeepers by hostile fire.

The humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic remains concerning. Following the outbreak of the conflict in the Sudan, the country is facing an influx of refugees and returnees in urgent need of protection and assistance. I thank donors for their generous support to the 2023 humanitarian response plan. However, as of June, the plan is funded only to

28 per cent. I appeal for further support, including for the revised humanitarian response plan, to address the most urgent needs of people in distress.

There is another unfolding humanitarian crisis at the border between the Central African Republic and Chad. Since May, tens of thousands of people, mostly women and children, have crossed the border from Chad into the Central African Republic, fleeing violence in the neighbouring Chadian region of Logone Oriental. On 8 June, the Prime Minister and myself visited Paoua and went to the nearby area of Bedaka, which is two kilometres from the border with Chad, in the Lim-Pendé prefecture, to assess the humanitarian and security situations. The visit highlighted the acute humanitarian needs in Bedaka and was an opportunity to provide an immediate and urgent humanitarian response and to mobilize support for both the displaced Chadians and the host communities. The joint commitment by the Government of the Central African Republic, MINUSCA and humanitarian partners to providing a strong and coordinated humanitarian response reassured local authorities, host communities and the displaced Chadians.

The prevailing economic conditions and situation in the country remain concerning. Commodity prices continue to rise, even doubling or tripling in areas that were dependent on imports from the Sudan. In that context, we welcome the approval of the International Monetary Fund's Extended Credit Facility arrangement. And the President has declared priorities, which will help the Central African Republic avoid default and provide services for its people. We encourage the Government to implement the reforms needed to improve the collection of internal resources and to enhance the transparency and controls in budget management that will enable international partners to resume direct budgetary support.

Human rights violations remain a concern in the Central African Republic. The Mission continues to work with the Government and encourage it to initiate independent and transparent investigations into human rights violations and abuses, as well as breaches of international humanitarian law by all parties to the conflict. The national authorities must be encouraged to continue to advance those investigations and finalize the pending cases for future trials. On a positive note, the conviction of five individuals for the murder of a Burundian peacekeeper in Grimari in March 2020 was a welcome development in the

efforts to ensure accountability for crimes committed against peacekeepers.

On 8 June, the United Nations decided to repatriate a unit of 60 military personnel and their commander from MINUSCA based on serious allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by some members of the unit. The allegations were reported by one of our local prevention-and-response-network partners. Local networks are a key pillar of MINUSCA's strategy for preventing and responding to sexual exploitation and abuse. The Mission took immediate action to strictly apply the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy for all allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse. MINUSCA will spare no effort in preventing new cases and ensuring that all uniformed and civilian personnel honour the Secretary-General's zero-tolerance policy, including by enhancing preventive and response measures. I also want to call on troop- and police-contributing countries to continue to enhance their role in ensuring zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse. The Mission will be working with Headquarters to explore specific prevention and monitoring measures for contingents at risk.

Lastly, I welcome the continued constructive cooperation between the Government and MINUSCA. MINUSCA will continue to support the Central African Republic in creating a political and security environment that is conducive to lasting peace, stability and sustainable development, which can be achieved only through the concerted efforts of all partners.

The President: I thank Ms. Rugwabiza for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Ms. Bahous.

Ms. Bahous: At the outset, I would like to recognize World Refugee Day today, as well as all who are forced to flee their homes as a result of conflict, instability and climate change, especially women and girls, who are disproportionately affected. We honour all refugees today. We honour their courage, strength and resilience.

One of the most repeated phrases in this Chamber in recent years has been "women's full, equal and meaningful participation". I want to focus on that today in the context of the Central African Republic, ahead of the constitutional referendum and the first local elections since 1988. Women in the Central African Republic have had a parity law and a 35 per cent quota in all decision-making bodies since 2016, and that

remains in effect until 2027. The Government's first national action plan on women and peace and security was adopted in 2014, and it is working on the third iteration of that plan. Those are remarkable efforts that should be applauded and recognized.

I also commend the Council's efforts to ensure that its resolutions on the Central African Republic encompass clear directives on women and peace and security, including for the mandates of both the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic and the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic. And yet women continue to be extremely marginalized in decision-making in general and in peace processes in particular. As in many other countries on the Security Council's agenda, there is no lack of norms or plans. It is their inadequate implementation, enforcement and funding that is failing the women of the Central African Republic.

When the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic was signed in 2019, only eight of the 78 delegates representing the different parties were women, and only one of the 14 signatories. All 11 of the facilitators designated by the African Union were men. There are currently no women in the monitoring mechanism of the Luanda road map. The numbers are not much better in national dialogues. In the Bangui Forum in 2015, women constituted only 20 per cent of the 800 participants. In the 2022 republican dialogue, only 17 per cent of the 450 participants were women. Perhaps the most positive example of women's representation is the Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission, with five women among its 11 members, including the President. However, two years after its launch, it still lacks the financial resources to get off the ground. And in several of the key committees dealing with peace and security issues, such as disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and security-sector reform, women's representation is marginal or non-existent.

In the 2021 elections, in spite of the parity law, the percentage of women in the National Assembly increased only modestly, from 8 to 12 per cent. There are clear indications why that is so. Of the more than 1,500 candidates, only 15 per cent were women. Party lists were validated and accepted, despite the fact that they failed to meet the quota. In a study that UN-Women conducted last year, we found that 43 per cent

of women candidates were victims of physical violence during their campaigns. They were threatened by armed groups or even kidnapped. Women voters were refused entry into voting centres or turned back because they lacked birth certificates. Some mechanisms did make a difference, though. The United Nations set up hotlines and situation rooms for women across the country. In one case, a woman candidate who was being threatened by armed men called the hotline to relay her location with the sound of gunfire in the background. The peacekeepers closest to her location were swiftly mobilized, and the armed men left. Today she is a member of Parliament. Let us all applaud her.

As in many other countries, women in the Central African Republic are very active in the work of building peace, mediating conflicts at the local level and protecting their communities, often at their own risk and expense. In many cases, they overcome sexual violence, conflict-related psychological trauma or the loss of a husband to care for the growing numbers of orphans and take on new roles as breadwinners, amid acute food insecurity. Nearly one in two households in the Central African Republic is now headed by a woman.

On the whole, we are falling short of our commitments and of the aspirations of women in the Central African Republic. Several of the women invited here from civil society have told the Council that women are often engaged only in consultations in the margins or when missions from external actors visit the country. They are rarely invited to provide meaningful input in decision-making processes, and initiatives targeting women rarely feed into the formal peace process.

There is a vibrant civil society in the Central African Republic, yet women report that for them the civic space is closing. The conflict and the humanitarian emergency have exacerbated many issues that disproportionately affect women and girls and that have a direct bearing on their ability to participate fully, equally and meaningfully in their communities. We need their voices and their agency, yet they risk harassment, including from armed groups, if they speak up or collaborate with the Government or the United Nations.

More broadly, gender-based violence is on the rise, strongly correlated with arms proliferation. Just one third of rape survivors are able to access clinical management within 72 hours, and the list goes on. The

many brave women who want to shape the future of their country must be given the space and the resources to do so. We must all do our part to create that space.

We are at a critical juncture for women's participation, with a constitutional referendum and elections that could result in instability and violence again. While much can be said about the resurgence of attacks by armed groups, ethnic conflict, the spillover effects of the crisis in the Sudan and the regional and global dynamics at play in the Central African Republic, the extreme underrepresentation of women in all decision-making is rarely mentioned or addressed. And yet it is one of the reasons we keep going through cycles of violence and instability, and addressing it is one of our best hopes for a future for the country.

In the coming months, the constitutional referendum and the local elections are more likely to be peaceful under the following four conditions — that women activists can speak their mind freely, that women's organizations have the resources to build peace and social cohesion in their communities and mitigate tensions, that women candidates can run for office without threats and harassment and that international partners work together with the Government and civil society in the country in order to ensure that upcoming milestones contribute to peace rather than risk further instability.

I urge one and all to reinforce this message, both in the Security Council and as partners of the Central African Republic.

The President: I thank Ms. Bahous for her briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Adeoye.

Mr. Adeoye: The political, security and humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic remains of critical concern to the African Union. Just last week, in its consideration of the situation in the Central African Republic, the African Union Peace and Security Council expressed grave concern about the deterioration of the security situation in the country, exacerbated by the spillover of the conflict from neighbouring countries, particularly the Sudan. That includes the proliferation of illegal weapons and the exploitation of the country's natural resources.

Moreover, the political situation remains fragile. Recently, the announcement of a constitutional reform process, with the referendum scheduled for the end of July, is also a determining factor for stability and

social cohesion. It is, however, imperative that all stakeholders in the Central African Republic put the overall and supreme interest of the country first by transcending their current disagreements to reach a national consensus that reflects the interests of the good people of the Central African Republic.

It is even more imperative, in the light of the upcoming local elections to be held this year, that this democratic step should lead to consolidating the gains in the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic. In particular, the deepening of its social contract between the citizens and their elected leaders will achieve the necessary peace dividends that we all crave in the Central African Republic.

Furthermore, the dynamic of the peace process comes with a positive development as a strong demonstration of the commitment of the authorities to implement the Political Agreement and the Luanda joint road map for peace in the Central African Republic. The African Union is glad to note that, in December 2022 and April 2023, the successful dismantling of the armed groups was equally a testament to the sustained commitment of the good intentions of the Government of His Excellency President Touadera. We must join the Central African Government in reaffirming that dialogue, not violence, is the main vehicle to resolving the differences in the Central African Republic. We therefore strongly believe that, in that context, the ongoing disarmament, rehabilitation and reintegration should remain critical to fostering comprehensive peace dividends in the Central African Republic.

The African Union is also pleased to note that the pooling of the Luanda joint road map with the Political Agreement will lead to important achievements regarding mediation, cross-border issues and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, which are critical to promoting durable peace and reconciliation. Nonetheless, we must acknowledge that a number of challenges remain related to security, financial stability and the dire humanitarian situation, which the head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic also reported.

It is essential to note that the crisis in the Sudan has further aggravated the security situation in the Central African Republic. We therefore wish to emphasize the need to ensure the full implementation of the 2020

Yaoundé Declaration, and I call on the Security Council and the international community to continue to provide humanitarian assistance to people in need, especially women and children.

In conclusion, permit me to underscore several key messages to the Security Council.

First, the African Union wishes to stress that the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic remains the most viable instrument and the recognized framework for addressing the crisis in the Central African Republic. In that regard, we once again emphasize that in order to strengthen the ongoing efforts it is vital to achieve synergies between the Political Agreement and the Luanda joint road map.

Secondly, it is equally important that the Government and all political and social actors take the necessary steps to ensure that the local elections are held as scheduled, in 2023, and in a transparent, free, credible, inclusive and fair manner.

In the light of the legitimate concerns that the Central African Republic may be affected by the instability and infighting in the Sudan, we would also like to emphasize that cross-border movements of displaced persons should continue to be facilitated while armed groups' small arms and light weapons are curtailed, so as to assure that the smuggling of weapons across the border will not become a multiplying factor for the crisis in the two countries. The Council must examine the situation with the determination to agree on a comprehensive support package for the Central African people.

Thirdly, in view of the tense security situation, it is imperative that the institutional capacity of the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic be strengthened. Accordingly, the African Union wishes to strongly reiterate its call for the complete lifting of the arms embargo imposed on the Central African Republic. For us, this lifting will enable the Armed Forces to effectively carry out their constitutional mandate of defending and protecting the country and its citizens, particularly given the potential spillover of the crisis from the Sudan into Central African Republic.

Finally, on behalf of the African Union, I reaffirm the continued support of our Union to the Government and the people of the Central African Republic. We call on the Security Council to show equally strong support for

the operations of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic. It is also important that the countries of the region continue to enjoy the tireless support of the Council in fostering comprehensive peace, stability and prosperity in the Central African Republic.

The President: I thank Mr. Adeoye for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Ngatondang.

Mr. Ngatondang (*spoke in French*): On behalf of the people of the Central African Republic, united in their ethnic and cultural diversity, indivisible, peaceful and hospitable, I have the honour of addressing the Security Council in a few very significant words out of a need to bear true witness to the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and its efforts to contribute to the strengthening of the peace process and the protection of civilian populations in my country, the Central African Republic.

I speak as a national expert on the prevention of hate speech likely to lead to conflict, and as President and Country Coordinator of the non-governmental organization, Jeunesse en Marche pour le Développement en Centrafrique, which aims to promote a peaceful, democratic and equitable Central African community in which all people are protected in strict compliance with human rights. My experience and knowledge of the Central African terrain are fundamental to this unconditional commitment to maintaining peace and the protection of civilians in my country.

Indeed, despite the misinformation and rumours about MINUSCA's presence and actions in the Central African Republic, Council members should not be surprised if my briefing today calls into question what they have no doubt learned about this important United Nations mission deployed in the Central African Republic, which has been truly instrumental in restoring peace, social cohesion and reconciliation to Central Africans. Yes, for such a large mission, unintentional blunders are inevitable, as it is of course impossible for human work to be perfect. But aware and above all patriotic, the people of the Central African Republic still recognize the unconditional importance of this great United Nations mission, not only for the protection of civilians, but above all for protecting and safeguarding the Central African peace that is still being built, with many challenges still to be met by MINUSCA. At the same time, the political, security and economic

situation in the Central African Republic continues to encourage its citizens to renew their special confidence in MINUSCA for a new, strengthened mandate for the protection of civilians, security and peacekeeping in the Central African Republic.

That is why, through me, the people of the Central African Republic, who remain vulnerable and exposed to a high risk of human rights violations, request the Security Council to renew MINUSCA's mandate as an unconditional guarantee of the protection of civilians and for the safety of populations in the face of enemies of universal peace. This request to the Security Council is a heartfelt cry from the vulnerable and disadvantaged populations of the Central African Republic for assurances that there will no longer be any gratuitous victims of human rights violations habitually caused by armed groups and/or unidentified armed persons throughout the territory of the Central African Republic, that the presence of armed groups in the Central African Republic will be eliminated, that MINUSCA's quick-impact projects will be reoriented towards helping the revival of the agropastoral, income-generating and entrepreneurial activities of young people — farmers and herders, as well as victims of recurrent armed conflicts in the Central African Republic — and that all local actions to combat misinformation and hate speech likely to lead to interreligious and community conflicts will be taken into account in developing the Mission's rapid-impact projects strategy, so as to accelerate the process of transforming the minds and actions of all Central Africans towards the maintenance of peace, interreligious and social cohesion and integrated local development ideal for the possible stabilization in the Central African Republic.

Allow me to conclude my remarks by inviting the Security Council to believe in the Central Africans — who no longer want war, but are committed to a definitive return to peace, to living together and to integrated development in their country, the Central African Republic. Long live the respected Central African people. Long live Central African peace.

The President (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank Mr. Ngatondang for his briefing.

I shall now give the floor to those members of the Council who wish to make statements.

Mrs. Broadhurst Estival (France) (*spoke in French*): I would like to thank the Special Representative for her comprehensive briefing. I would also like to

thank Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, Mr. Bankole Adeoye and Mr. Rhosyns Ngatondang for their briefings. I would also like to welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic to today's meeting.

Significant progress has been made in the Central African Republic in recent months. Thanks to the good offices of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), the decentralization of the peace process has continued, and the authority of the State has gradually been extended. Two more armed groups have laid down their arms, confirming the progress of the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration programme. This momentum must now be maintained with other armed groups.

Thanks in particular to the positive role played by Angola, the dialogue between the Central African Republic and Chad has advanced and enabled the implementation of concrete cooperation, including at the military level. We encourage the Central African authorities to continue their efforts to ensure that the progress achieved is sustainable. The African Union, the Economic Community of Central African States, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the countries in the region must remain key actors in relaunching the peace process in the Central African Republic. We also welcome the growing cooperation of the Central African authorities and MINUSCA and hope that this dynamic will continue. We also welcome the measures taken by the Mission in line with the Secretary-General's commitment to a policy of zero tolerance of sexual exploitation and abuse.

The situation in the Central African Republic remains fragile. Armed groups continue to commit violence against civilians and the Central African forces. The humanitarian situation, which is already very precarious, is deteriorating owing to the impact of the crisis in the Sudan, which has led to the influx of almost 15,000 refugees into the north-east of the country. France has mobilized more than €40 million to address the humanitarian crisis in the Sudan and its impact on neighbouring countries.

On the political front, we note the temporary suspension of the organization of local elections and the announcement of a constitutional referendum. And we call for those elections to be held in an inclusive, free, transparent, credible and peaceful manner so that

all voices, including those of young people and women, can be heard.

Finally, France remains very concerned about the human rights violations committed by all parties and in particular by the members of the Wagner Group, who are committing acts of violence against the civilian population. Those violations must not go unpunished. The Wagner Group's presence reflects a predatory approach to the country's natural resources. It is not intended to bring lasting stability to the Central African Republic.

In conclusion, I would like to reiterate our full support for Special Representative Valentine Rugwabiza and commend her resolute action at the head of MINUSCA.

Mrs. Baeriswyl (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): I would like to begin by thanking the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for her statement and her valuable daily work on the ground. I also would like to take the opportunity to thank the Executive Director of UN-Women; the African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security; and the Head of Association of the Jeunesse en Marche pour le Développement en Centrafrique for their statements. I would like to welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic and the representatives of the States of the region.

There can be no doubt that women are indispensable actors in the struggle for lasting peace in Central Africa and elsewhere. Yet, as a representative of Central African civil society shared during the visit of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic earlier this month,

“Central African women are pillars of peace, but they are too often sidelined.”

We therefore welcome your call, Madam President, to pay particular attention to the women and peace and security agenda in our deliberations today. It is vital that Council members include and support women's commitment to peace.

I will therefore focus on the women and peace and security agenda for three points that I would like to raise.

First, for peace to take root and endure, women must be at the forefront of all political processes. We

note the Central African Government's announcement of a constitutional referendum, a direct democracy tool which is dear to Switzerland. We therefore call on the Central African authorities to guarantee an open, transparent, free and fair process — a process that ensures the full, equal and meaningful participation of women. The same applies to the upcoming local elections, where women candidates must be able to present themselves free of all threats and reprisals. In that regard, we encourage the Government to redouble its efforts to implement the gender parity law, which requires at least 35 per cent of political posts to be held by women.

Secondly, despite an improvement in the security situation in certain regions, armed groups continue to operate, as we heard today from the Special Representative. Indeed, on the borders with the Sudan and Chad, illicit arms trafficking, illegal taxation and attacks on the civilian population are increasing. That makes humanitarian access even more difficult. And yet again the greatest impact is on women. Traditionally engaged in field work, they are more exposed not only to the presence of armed actors, but also to the improvised explosive devices which are scattered throughout certain rural areas. We call on the Central African authorities to ensure the protection of the civilian population and their rights. In that regard, we welcome the initiatives undertaken by the Government to help some 13,000 refugees and returnees from the Sudan.

Thirdly, the fight against impunity must be stepped up. Women victims of sexual violence continue to be stigmatized, and those violations are often settled outside the formal justice system. For that to end, the regular justice system must be strengthened, and public confidence in it must be increased. As the Minister of State for Justice, Human Rights Promotion and Good Governance stressed last week,

“Justice is a prerequisite for building and strengthening the rule of law.”

Nevertheless, the Special Criminal Court still lacks resources, and the Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission is facing major delays. We therefore encourage the Government and the international community to support those institutions, which can lay the foundations for reconciliation and lasting peace in the country.

Finally, Switzerland remains concerned by the serious allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse

committed by certain peacekeepers of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic. We welcome the strong commitment of the Secretary-General and especially his Special Representative to ensuring zero tolerance of such incidents.

We cannot consolidate peace as long as daily violence continues to affect half the population. The response to the country's insecurity lies in inclusive political processes, based on international law, guaranteeing women's rights and creating a safe and respectful environment for their participation. In that context, we also support the four principles proposed by the Executive Director of UN-Women. In the future, let us work together to ensure that women are no longer invisible victims, but recognized actors in peace and security in the Central African Republic.

Mr. Biang (Gabon) (*spoke in French*): I have the honour of delivering this statement on behalf of the three African members of the Security Council (A3), namely, Ghana, Mozambique and, my country, Gabon.

We thank Special Representative Ms. Valentine Rugwabiza for her enlightening briefing, as well as the Executive Director of UN-Women, Ms. Sima Bahous, and the African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, Mr. Bankole Adeoye. We listened attentively to Mr. Rhosyns Ngatondang. We welcome the participation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic, Her Excellency Ms. Sylvie Baipo Temon, in this meeting.

The report of the Secretary-General on the situation in the Central African Republic (S/2023/442) and the consequences for peace and stability provide us with an opportunity to reiterate the support of the A3 for the restoration of peace and security in the Central African Republic.

Our statement will focus on the political, security and humanitarian situation in the country.

First, with regard to the political situation, the A3 welcomes the holding of the first ordinary session of the National Assembly from 1 March to 31 May. We note the ongoing efforts to mutualize the Luanda joint road map and the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic under the aegis of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and also welcome the Government's efforts to decentralize that peace process,

notably through the organization of a conference involving all prefectures and local players with a view to fostering local ownership of the peace process.

We take note of the announcement of the temporary suspension of preparations for local elections by the President of the National Electoral Authority and of the announcement of the organization of the constitutional referendum scheduled for 30 July. We call on the Government to continue to engage constructively with all political parties, including the opposition and civil society, to ensure the inclusive participation of all Central Africans in those elections. We call on the country's authorities to pursue their efforts to strengthen social cohesion, tolerance and dialogue with all segments of society in the Central African Republic, especially the country's women and young people. The recent election of four women to the National Assembly is an encouraging sign of women's inclusion in the political process, which warrants our acknowledgement.

We welcome the commitment of President João Manuel Gonçalves of Angola to help strengthen dialogue and cooperation between President Faustin Archange Touadera of the Central African Republic and President Mahamat Idriss Déby Itno of the Chadian Transition by convening the Luanda meeting on 8 February, which enabled discussing mutual security concerns of the Central African Republic and Chad, with a view to shoring up border security and regional relations. We also welcome the visit by the Panel of the Wise of the African Union to the Central African Republic from 5 to 11 March, which was aimed at engaging with local and international actors to discuss political processes in order to prevent the resurgence of conflict and promote a peaceful, secure and stable society in the Central African Republic. In that regard, the A3 welcomes the continued commitment of the African Union, the ICGLR and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) to ensure the stabilization of the Central African Republic.

With regard to the security situation, Ghana, Mozambique and Gabon recall that the Central African Republic is facing many complex security challenges, such as cross-border insecurity, illicit trafficking in natural resources and small arms and light weapons, an increase in the use of explosive devices by armed groups and an increase in the latter's activities directed against the defence and security forces and the civilian population of the Central African Republic and humanitarian workers. We note that the security

of the Central African Republic is linked to that of its neighbouring countries. It is therefore critical to undertake coordinated actions at the regional level in order to effectively combat armed groups operating in border areas. In that regard, we encourage conducting joint military operations between the Central African Republic and Chad to combat cross-border insecurity.

We are deeply concerned by the use of increasingly sophisticated weaponry by local and foreign armed groups in the Central African Republic, despite the arms embargo against them. Furthermore, we note the threats to security posed by the large-scale displacement of populations in the Central African Republic against the backdrop of the crisis in the Sudan. Ghana, Mozambique and Gabon condemn in the strongest terms the repeated attacks by armed groups against civilian populations, humanitarian workers, MINUSCA and the members of the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic, who are fighting daily to safeguard the country's territorial integrity. The perpetrators of those heinous crimes must be brought before justice and held to account. We extend our deepest condolences to all families whose mourning has been the result armed groups' violence.

The continued predatory exploitation of natural resources by armed groups will continue to propitiate the cycle of violence against civilian populations as long as the buyers' demand meets the traffickers' illegal supply. We underscore that protecting populations also requires the certification and traceability of minerals and the securing of borders in order to dry up funding sources for armed groups. To that end, we welcome the efforts of the Central African Republic to implement the operational framework for the resumption of rough diamond exports under the Kimberly Process and call on the Kimberley Process review mission to visit the Central African Republic to assess the Government's request to extend compliant zones to the subprefectures concerned. The A3 recalls that, in the Central African Republic, diamond mining remains a major sector and source of income for the populations in the production areas. The lifting of sanctions on the proposed zones will enable improving the living conditions of artisanal miners and their families.

We stress that achieving lasting peace will be possible only if the authorities of the Central African Republic have the means necessary to fulfil their sovereign duty of ensuring the security the people and territory of the Central African Republic. The A3 reiterates the need to strengthen the operational

capabilities of the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic so that they are commensurate with the new threats seen on the ground, including in the area of human rights. In that regard, we must support the efforts of the Central African Republic in attaining the material resources and operational capabilities necessary for the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic to sustainably secure the country.

We encourage MINUSCA and international partners to pursue their training of the Armed Forces of the Central African Republic, and we align ourselves with the call by the African Union Peace and Security Council in its 13 June communiqué, which was supported by the ICGLR and ECCAS, for the total lifting of the arms embargo imposed on the Central African Republic and of the notification system so that the national defence and security forces of the Central African Republic can carry out unhindered their constitutional mandate to defend and protect the country and its citizens, including its natural resources. Those requests were reiterated by Ambassador Adeoye and formerly made by the authorities of the Central African Republic during the country visit by the Sanctions Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013), concerning the Central African Republic, from 6 to 9 June.

There can be no peace without inclusive political dialogue. We urge all armed groups to lay down their weapons immediately, recommit to the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, without conditions, and participate in the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration (DDRR) programmes, whose successful implementation we commend, while demobilizing more than 5,000 out of its initial target of 7,000 people. We are encouraged by the dissolution during the period under review of five armed groups that signed the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, thereby bringing the total number of dissolved armed groups to nine. In order to implement DDRR programmes, the authorities of the Central African Republic must have the financial means necessary to provide alternatives to former combatants, which requires ongoing financial support from the international community.

The increase in violence is eroding respect for the rule of law. Violations of human rights and humanitarian law committed by armed groups are increasing at an alarming rate. Given the many abuses

faced by civilians, having a solid judicial system in place is imperative. We welcome the progress made by the Central African authorities in strengthening the presence of judicial personnel throughout the country, the Government's decision to increase the budget of the national judicial oversight mechanism by 80 per cent for 2023 from, as compared to the previous year, and the criminal proceedings at the Special Criminal Court that resulted in the conviction of the murderer of a Burundian peacekeeper in 2020. With regard to the number of human rights violations allegedly perpetrated by State actors, we recall that they mainly concern detention-related violations, in particular arbitrary arrests and detentions resulting from operations carried out by the defence forces in response to the growing number of attacks, ambushes and civilian abductions perpetrated by armed groups. We reiterate that the methodology used for this assessment does not reflect the actual efforts of the authorities of the Central African Republic in that matter. The methodology needs to be reviewed and improved in order to take a constructive approach. We welcome MINUSCA's support to the Central African Republic's penitentiary system, and in view of the immense needs, we call for the mobilization of all partners. We have also taken note of the measures taken by the Secretary-General to address the allegations involving United Nations personnel on the ground, and we hope those isolated cases will not tarnish the Mission's image in the eyes of the population.

We cannot discuss the multidimensional challenges facing the Central African Republic without shining a light on the country's worsening economic crisis. The coronavirus disease pandemic, rising oil and commodity prices and the liquidity crisis are undermining the economic fabric of the Central African Republic, already under the strain created by the country's instability. We welcome the credit facility granted by the International Monetary Fund and call for strengthening that support in the light of the impact that the crisis in the Sudan is having on the Central African market.

The humanitarian crisis in the Central African Republic is affecting 3.4 million people, which means that 56 per cent of the population is in need of assistance and protection. The situation is steadily worsening against the backdrop of a surge in violence against civilians by armed groups and the influx of refugees and returnees from the Sudan. It is therefore vital to support the financing of the humanitarian response

plan, which is funded only to 28 per cent. We salute the commitment of the humanitarians on the ground, despite the known security risks. Ghana, Mozambique and Gabon underscore that the vulnerability of the country's populations is being exacerbated by the effects of climate change, which are ruining the livelihoods of several million people and worsening community tensions.

In conclusion, Ghana, Mozambique and Gabon reaffirm their solidarity with the Government and the people of the Central African Republic and their commitment to respecting the country's independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty. We reiterate our support for Special Representative Rugwabiza and her team for their tireless efforts on the ground.

Ms. Gatt (Malta): I thank Ms. Rugwabiza, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ms. Bahous, the Executive Director of UN-Women, African Union Commissioner Adeoye and Mr. Ngatondang for their insightful remarks. I would also like to welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic to this meeting.

At the outset, I want to express our sympathy to the Burundian peacekeepers who were injured in an attack on the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) on 13 June.

We reaffirm our commitment to the sovereignty, independence and ownership of the Central African Republic in defining political priorities. Nevertheless, we are concerned about the recent decisions to suspend local elections and to call for a constitutional referendum to be held on 30 July. It is crucial for the people of the Central African Republic to be provided with the information they need to guide their opinions, with sufficient time and in an open and inclusive civic space. We condemn the violence in the country and urge all armed groups to lay down their weapons unconditionally. We also deplore the presence of foreign armed groups and militias. At the same time, we encourage the authorities to continue investing in a holistic manner by prioritizing political dialogue and the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic over military action and keeping permanent demobilization at the forefront of their work. We also commend the ongoing efforts to address bilateral issues with Chad through sustained dialogue.

The impact of military operations on local communities is often intolerable, and military gains should be accompanied by progress in good governance, accountability and the strengthening of the judicial system. The conflict in the Sudan has had severe spillover effects in the Central African Republic, and we express our solidarity with the authorities as they continue to welcome refugees and returnees. Greater support from the international community and humanitarian partners is clearly necessary.

We are alarmed by the figures for abductions and the recruitment and use of children in the Central African Republic, an area where the movement of armed groups has led to increasing numbers of grave violations. Sustainable financing, especially for projects such as vocational training centres, is crucial to returning children to society following their release from armed groups. Malta calls on Member States to ensure proper financing for child protection efforts through the Fifth Committee and MINUSCA.

We also welcome today's focus on women and peace and security in the Central African Republic. Gender-sensitive conflict analysis has been largely absent from the reporting in this area, particularly on women's role in political security, peace and humanitarian efforts and on the barriers related to that. In a week when we are marking the International Day for Women in Diplomacy, we emphasize the importance of ensuring that women are respected, consulted and included in every process of policy- and decision-making. Incitement, violence and intimidation directed at women human rights defenders and peacebuilders and women's civil-society groups must cease if we are to see a safe environment that ensures women's full, equal and meaningful participation. The establishment of gender-responsive legal frameworks and the decree on the implementation of the parity law, as well as a revision of the law on political parties and the electoral code, must be given priority. We commend MINUSCA and Ms. Rugwabiza's leadership in their renewed efforts to coordinate with the authorities and extend State authority in the country. We deplore the allegations of sexual abuse by a contingent from the Mission and fully support the decision to repatriate the peacekeepers concerned. We strongly encourage MINUSCA to take every possible measure to assist and support the victims.

In conclusion, we continue to believe that addressing the root causes of conflict while investing in the protection and promotion of the fundamental

rights of the people of the Central African Republic, especially women and children, is key to unlocking peace and security in the region. It is only by cultivating an inclusive public space and extending State authority that a peaceful and promising future for the country can be advanced.

Mr. Dai Bing (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): First of all, I welcome Foreign Minister Baipo Temon of the Central African Republic to today's meeting. I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Rugwabiza, Executive Director Bahous and Commissioner Adeoye for their briefings. I also listened carefully to Mr. Ngatondang's statement. In connection with the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/442), I would like to make the following points.

First, there has been important progress on the peace process in the Central African Republic. China commends the Government of the Central African Republic for honouring the commitments in the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, accelerating the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration process and advancing local-level peace processes. China is pleased to see that a number of armed groups in the Central African Republic have recently announced their disarmament, and we call on those that have not yet disarmed to cease hostilities and join the peace process as soon as possible so that all the parties can jointly uphold the hard-won gains of peace.

China appreciates and supports the continuing constructive role played by the African Union, the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Economic Community of Central African States, among others, and expects the international community to provide financial and technical support for the Central African Republic's peace process, local elections and disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration process. The constitutional referendum to be held next month is a major step in the political process. China encourages all the parties to enhance mutual trust through dialogue and to resolve possible differences. The United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) can provide necessary support for the conduct of the referendum in the light of the country's needs.

Secondly, China supports the efforts of the Government of the Central African Republic in

maintaining security and protecting civilians. At the moment armed groups are still carrying out violent activities in regions outside Bangui, the capital, threatening local stability. An attack took place in March in the town of Bambari, resulting in casualties of 11 Chinese citizens. China strongly condemns it and requests an in-depth investigation and severe punishments for the perpetrators. We are grateful to MINUSCA for providing enhanced protection of Chinese citizens on the ground and for the necessary assistance offered to the Chinese Embassy.

The security and humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic's border areas with neighbouring countries such as Chad and the Sudan needs major attention. The international community, in a targeted manner, should help the Central African armed forces enhance security capacity-building and guard against the threat of armed groups. We must support the Central African Republic in bolstering border control with its neighbours and in safeguarding common security. As mandated by the Security Council, MINUSCA should support the security forces of the Central African Republic in enhancing deployment and protecting civilians.

Thirdly, on multiple occasions, the Government of the Central African Republic has made strong requests for the Security Council to completely lift the arms embargo. Those requests have received a positive response from countries of the region. On 13 June, the African Union Peace and Security Council reiterated the request for lifting the arms embargo on the Central African Republic. The Security Council should heed the legitimate aspirations of the Central African Republic and countries of the region by adjusting, without delay, the ill-fitting sanctions measures and completely lifting the embargo as soon as possible.

Under the leadership of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Rugwabiza, MINUSCA has enhanced coordination with the Government of the Central African Republic and worked extensively in responding to the threat of armed groups, protecting civilians and supporting local elections, among other things. Incidents of status-of-forces agreement violations have seen a marked decline, which fully demonstrates that establishing mutual trust with the country concerned and engaging in cooperation are prerequisites for the successful mandate delivery of any peacekeeping operation. China supports MINUSCA and the Special Representative of the Secretary-

General in playing a greater role in the peace process of the Central African Republic.

Mr. Sénéchal de Goffredo Junior (Brazil): My delegation would like to thank the briefers for their insights and welcome the Foreign Minister of the Central African Republic to today's meeting.

With regard to the most recent developments on the ground, my delegation wishes to highlight the following points.

First, Brazil remains worried about the humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic. We note with concern the security vacuum created by the withdrawal of the Central African Republic-Chad-Sudan tripartite joint force from the border area and its potential implications, particularly in relation to the protection of civilians and the already dire humanitarian situation. The influx of Sudanese refugees and returnees since April has also had a serious impact on the humanitarian situation, adding an extra challenge to the provision of humanitarian assistance. Furthermore, we find alarming the recurrent use of explosive devices, which hampers humanitarian access. Their impact on civilians, humanitarian actors and peacekeepers is a distressing trend. We salute the work done by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) to mitigate that threat.

Secondly, we wish to underscore the key role played by the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes in the implementation of the 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and commend the Central African authorities for the progress in dissolving armed groups. In order to complement those DDR activities, the Government has also been working with MINUSCA to put in place violence reduction programmes in local communities. We want to encourage the Government to persevere not just in that partnership but also in its ongoing work to reintegrate ex-combatants into the national defence and internal security forces. Nevertheless, we remain concerned about reports of continued violence, as well as by the emergence of armed self-defence groups.

Thirdly, we believe that it is crucial to strengthen the presence of State authority across the country and thereby enforce the rule of law, especially in the light of the reports of human rights and international humanitarian law violations. In that vein, we would

like to reiterate our support for the efforts of the local authorities to deliver justice, in particular through the Special Criminal Court, and to the work of MINUSCA to assist in the operationalization of the Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission. We would like to congratulate the Government of the Central African Republic on its efforts to decentralize the peace process.

My fourth and last point relates to the contribution of regional organizations to the peace process in the Central African Republic. In that regard, it is particularly encouraging to see the renewed engagement of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region in favour of the implementation of the September 2021 road map. We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Rugwabiza for her active participation in the process and hope that the technical support and leadership provided by Angola, as well as the monitoring mechanisms agreed, will continue to bear fruit.

Before I conclude, let me welcome the final report (see S/2023/360) of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic and express our sincere appreciation for its efforts to provide input to enable us to have a broader, clearer picture of the situation and its respective challenges.

Finally, I wish to reiterate Brazil's commitment to collaborating with other Council members to support the fulfilment of MINUSCA's mandate.

Mr. Nebenzia (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Valentine Rugwabiza, UN-Women Executive Director Sima Bahous and African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security Bankole Adeoye for their briefings. We listened attentively to the statement made by Mr. Rhosyns Ngatondang.

We welcome the participation in today's meeting of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic, Francophonie and Central Africans abroad, Ms. Sylvie Baipo-Temon; the Secretary of State for External Relations of Angola, Esmeralda Mendonça; and the representatives of Rwanda, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Equatorial Guinea.

We are closely following the situation in the Central African Republic. We note with satisfaction

that, overall, the situation is under the control of the Government forces. With the support of partners, including Russia, the authorities of the Central African Republic have managed to overcome the most difficult phase in the fight against those who have attempted to effect an unconstitutional change of power through armed force. However, security threats have not been fully eliminated. The Coalition of Patriots for Change, the largest and most combat-ready faction, has not given up the armed struggle against the Government.

Militants are especially active in the border areas with Chad, the Sudan, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. The porosity of borders and lack of financial resources for border control do not allow Central African authorities to effectively counter the cross-border movement of illegal armed groups and their weapons supply. Increased coordination between Bangui and neighbouring countries is required, and we are seeing progress in that regard, including in the military sphere. Targeted donor assistance is also crucial.

Although it has been eased, the current arms embargo reduces the effectiveness of the armed forces of the Central African Republic, markedly constraining Bangui's ability to impose order in the country and curbing threats from militants, who refuse to engage in the national reconciliation process.

A letter (S/2023/383) from the Secretary-General circulated to Security Council members in May cites the progress by the Government of the Central African Republic in meeting benchmarks for reviewing the sanctions regime. According to United Nations officials, the authorities have conducted considerable work on arms control, disarmament and the social reintegration of ex-combatants. The current situation therefore requires the complete lifting of the arms embargo on Bangui in order to strengthen the capacity of the national armed forces and law enforcement units. Such an approach is fully in the interest of sustainable settlement and reconciliation in the Central African Republic.

Both the African Union and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, as well as the African members of the Security Council, are unequivocally in favour of lifting the restrictions. The Central Africans themselves are constantly talking about it. It is obvious that long-term stabilization and progress in the political process are impossible without

effective support for the Central African Republic in enhancing the military capabilities of national armed forces and law enforcement units.

Nevertheless, we believe that the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, which was signed in Bangui on 6 February 2019, remains the basis for achieving stability and security in the country. We welcome the practical steps taken by Bangui to advance the political process, with a view to normalizing the situation in the Central African Republic. The illegal armed groups that have not signed the Luanda road map, under which the parties committed to ending hostilities and beginning the process of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants, must join the process. Militant leaders must abandon violent methods of struggle. They need to begin full-fledged dialogue with Bangui since there is no alternative to the political and diplomatic settlement in the Central African Republic. We note with satisfaction the announcement of the dissolution of five illegal armed groups in late April. To date, nine of the 14 signatory groups to the Political Agreement have been disbanded. This is a milestone in the process of implementing the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. However, for further progress, Bangui must continue to receive appropriate financial support.

We welcome the efforts of the Central African Republic authorities to establish a State presence, strengthen administrative structures, pursue security sector reform, develop the judiciary and prepare for the first local elections since 1988. We wish Bangui every success in organizing the constitutional referendum in late July. We believe that issues of internal reforms are the sovereign prerogative of the people of the Central African Republic, who have the inalienable right to determine their own development path.

The dire socioeconomic situation of the country is threatening to reverse the achievements of recent years in the field of national reconciliation. Developments in neighbouring Sudan are further aggravating the humanitarian situation in the country and increasing the burden on the State budget. About 14,000 refugees have already reached the country. In that regard, we believe that the Central African Republic should receive all possible assistance through international financial institutions and the United Nations. We consider it unacceptable to politicize the provision of donor

assistance, since it is primarily the civilian population that suffers from such actions.

An important factor in building Bangui's capacity to mount an effective humanitarian response and, in general, to improve the socioeconomic situation in the Central African Republic is the ability to make further progress in ensuring the full participation of the country in the Kimberley Process. It is important that a review mission of the Process be sent to the Central African Republic so that specialists can see for themselves that all the conditions for change on the ground have been met.

We continue to help the Central African Republic build its military capabilities. With the knowledge of the Sanctions Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013), more than one batch of military equipment were delivered to the country. Russian instructors are working successfully in the Central African Republic, where they were sent in response to a request from the legitimate authorities. The campaign to discredit them and, in general, attempts to lay the blame for human rights violations on the Central African Republic armed forces and bilateral partners are tailor-made and are not substantiated by established facts.

We consider it important that the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic continues to render effective support to the authorities. We thank the countries contributing troops who risk their lives every day in doing their duty. The United Nations Mission plays an important role in ensuring security and safety in the country. On the whole, we believe that it is important for the Mission to focus resources, first and foremost, on helping the authorities establish State control, counter armed groups and protect civilians. We are also convinced that the full implementation of the mandate is possible only through continued constructive cooperation with the authorities of the Central African Republic.

Clearly, only a comprehensive normalization of the security situation will enable Bangui to focus on creating a constructive domestic agenda for the benefit of citizens and the State. In July, the Security Council should do everything possible to facilitate this process, including lifting the remaining sanctions restrictions against the legitimate Government.

Mr. Kariuki (United Kingdom): I would like to thank Ms. Rugwabiza, Special Representative of the

Secretary-General for the Central African Republic, Executive Director Bahous, Commissioner Adeoye and Mr. Ngatondang for their briefings. I welcome the participation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic in this meeting.

I will make four points in response to what we have heard.

First, the United Kingdom reiterates the continued importance of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic. It remains the only viable option to end protracted conflict. We call on the Central African Republic authorities to build on political progress and ensure meaningful engagement with all political actors in the country. We commend the work of Special Representative Rugwabiza and the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), along with strong regional engagement in supporting those efforts.

Secondly, the United Kingdom highlights the need for transparent democratic processes in the Central African Republic. President Touadera's plans to overhaul the Central African Republic's Constitution risk unravelling years of the hard work to strengthen the country's democratic system. The referendum serves as a distraction from the main issues facing the country, including the dire humanitarian, economic and security situation.

Plans for the constitutional referendum have delayed local elections that are part of the democratic restructuring of the Central African Republic and are integral to its peace process. The United Kingdom hopes to see peaceful and credible local elections take place as quickly as possible.

Thirdly, we are concerned about the increasing disregard for human rights in the Central African Republic. The Secretary-General's latest report (S/2023/442) noted that State actors, including the Russian mercenary Wagner Group, perpetrated the highest number of human rights violations during the reporting period. As in other contexts, the Wagner Group continues to play a destabilizing role in the country. We again call on the Government of the Central African Republic to coordinate fully with all security actors operating in the country in order to ensure that they abide by applicable international humanitarian law and international human rights law and that all perpetrators of violations or abuses are held to account.

Finally, the recent allegations of acts of sexual exploitation and abuse by some MINUSCA personnel are deeply concerning. We support the measures taken by the Special Representative in repatriating the contingent of troops, and we urge a thorough investigation of all such allegations.

Mr. Pérez Loose (Ecuador): I thank Ms. Valentine Rugwabiza, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Central African Republic, for her briefing. I also thank Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, Executive Director of UN-Women; Mr. Bankole Adeoye, African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security; and Mr. Rhosyns Ngatondang, Head of Association, Jeunesse en Marche pour le Développement en Centrafrique, for their briefings. I welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic to this meeting.

The Central African Republic shares vast borders with five countries that are no strangers to political instability and violence. With that in mind, we recognize the challenges the country faces as it receives flows of migrants that are overwhelming humanitarian contingents. Porous borders provide corridors that enable organized crime to threaten the stability of the Central African Republic. The country's heritage of natural resources continues to be spoils fought over by transnational armed groups.

On the political front, we urge the Government to continue to promote dialogue so that the constitutional referendum can be held on 30 July in a civil manner and, above all, in a climate of peace. Democratic processes, particularly local elections, are vital for achieving decentralization. We hope that preparations for municipal elections slated for July will resume in September. We must more aid to the basket fund in order to ensure the holding of those elections.

Ecuador will continue championing greater and more significant participation of women in national political life. We urge continued efforts to reach the quota of 35 per cent participation of women in political office — a quota set in 2016.

Efforts to advance the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, with progress on the joint road map for peace in the Central African Republic of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region and the Luanda road map process, as well as the active contacts the Government pursues

with neighbouring countries and the prefectures, in addition to broadening the process internally with the support of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) — all show significant strides towards peace.

In terms of security, territorial control is essential, both for strengthening the rule of law and for institution-building and decentralization. For this reason, the progress made in the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and the recent announcement of the disbanding of two armed groups are encouraging. We commend the work of the Government and MINUSCA in strengthening the presence of the State in some areas following six years of absence, as well as in initiating community efforts aimed at restoring the social fabric.

We see with concern that the indiscriminate use of explosives and mines has increased. The population continues to be victimized by these dangers, as well as by extortion and the imposition of illegal taxes, which is why we call for the continuation of MINUSCA's joint efforts to clear these devices and protect civilians. We urge the Central African Republic's neighbouring countries to cooperate in the fight against the illegal trafficking of arms and explosives.

On the humanitarian situation, the report of the Secretary General (S/2023/442) indicates that due to the conflict in the Sudan, the number of people crossing into the Central African Republic is increasing. Humanitarian access to the displaced will worsen with the onset of the rainy season. It is estimated that 56 per cent of the Central African population will require humanitarian assistance. Efforts should be made to assist this population through voluntary contributions, and a support system is needed to open up financial flows that would enable the State to provide basic services for their development.

We continue to receive information on violations of human rights and international humanitarian law. We deplore gender-based violence and the use of sexual violence as a tactic of war, as well as violations perpetrated against ethnic and religious minorities. We call for investigations into these violations, from wherever they come. Combating impunity is essential to ending cycles of violence and promoting reconciliation.

We encourage the work carried out by the Special Criminal Court for war crimes and crimes against humanity, as well as the Truth, Justice, Reparation and Reconciliation Commission. We hope that the Central African Republic will continue to work with the Peacebuilding Commission to strengthen the judicial system.

Finally, Ecuador appreciates the work of MINUSCA and its active cooperation with the Government of the Central African Republic. We encourage continued dialogue to provide better results for the population that the Mission has the mandate and obligation to protect.

Mrs. Shino (Japan): I would like to express my gratitude to Special Representative of the Secretary-General Rugwabiza, Executive Director Bahous, African Union Commissioner Adeoye and Mr. Ngatondang for their briefings. I also welcome the presence of Her Excellency Foreign Minister Baipo-Temon from Central African Republic, and other representatives from the States of the region.

Let me first commend the continued dedication demonstrated by the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) in difficult conditions. The consolidation of peace and stability in the Central African Republic needs the effective implementation of MINUSCA's mandate. In that regard, we welcome ongoing close communication between the Government and the MINUSCA leadership.

However, it is deeply unsettling to hear of the serious allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse committed by United Nations peacekeepers. Any allegations should be thoroughly investigated, and a zero-tolerance policy for those heinous acts strictly upheld.

The security situation across the Central African Republic remains volatile due to continued military confrontations with armed groups. Violence and hostilities have compelled people to flee their homes, and women and children are suffering the most. Our already deep concerns are compounded by reports of sexual violence, including as a tactic of war, as well as the recruitment and use of children in conflict. We also continuously apprehend the human rights violations and abuses committed by armed groups, State agents and other security personnel that were mentioned in the recent report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/442) as allegedly responsible. To change course, the 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the

Central African Republic must be fully implemented by the signatories and with the highest priority. In that regard, I would like to highlight the following points.

First of all, it remains essential to place primary focus on inclusive dialogue and the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration (DDRR) process to achieve sustainable peace in the country. We commend the continuous efforts of the Government of the Central African Republic to engage with armed groups to seek a political solution, and we further welcome the resulting dissolution of several armed groups since the last briefing of the Security Council on the Central African Republic (see S/PV.9265). The ongoing offensive campaign should be accompanied by renewed attempts to bring those still fighting, though now on the defensive, back to the negotiating table. Demonstrating the successful transition of ex-combatants is key to motivating fragmented armed groups to participate in the national DDRR programme. We commend the Government's efforts made together with international partners to reduce the gap between demobilization and the start of the socioeconomic reintegration process, and for a smooth transition.

Secondly, we need to further promote a regional approach. The concentration of armed group activities and illicit flows of weapons in border areas clearly indicates the importance of more effective border controls in the region. The joint commission frameworks for cross-border issues with neighbouring countries must be more extensively utilized. Those frameworks should also contribute to strengthening natural-resource management to prevent illegal exploitation and trafficking of precious minerals.

The humanitarian situation around the borders is another serious concern. It has been worsened by the massive inflow of refugees due to the recent conflict in the Sudan, despite the Central African Republic's efforts to host over 10,000 Sudanese refugees. We need a coordinated approach by countries of the region to address the severe humanitarian needs and prevent any exploitation by armed groups. Japan has provided emergency food assistance to alleviate the human security crisis.

Lastly, the conduct of credible, peaceful and inclusive local elections remains the key to further extending State authority and promoting the rule of law. Stable local governance needs legitimate leaders supported by people's confidence. In that context,

MINUSCA's support role, in close coordination with the Government, is crucial. Japan remains committed to playing its part to assist in the betterment of the people of the Central African Republic.

Mr. Wood (United States of America): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Rugwabiza for her leadership and briefing today. The United States appreciates her, her team's and the troop- and police-contributing countries' commitment to peace in the Central African Republic. I also wish to thank Ms. Bahous, Ambassador Adeoye and Mr. Ngatondang for their informative and comprehensive briefings. I also welcome the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic to this meeting.

The United States is gravely concerned by reports earlier this month alleging that Tanzanian peacekeepers committed sexual exploitation and abuse. We commend the Secretariat for its swift decision following a preliminary investigation to repatriate the unit in support of the Secretary-General's policy of zero tolerance for sexual exploitation and abuse and in line with resolution 2272 (2016). Such behaviour is unacceptable, antithetical to the spirit of peacekeeping and undermines the positive contributions of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) to the country. We call for accountability and the full implementation of resolution 2272 (2016) when addressing those acts.

Separately, we commend the Mission's progress in conducting joint and coordinated patrols with Central African security forces, which have deterred armed group attacks against civilians by proactively addressing sources of instability.

MINUSCA has also played a key role in supporting the Government's preparations for upcoming local elections, including by encouraging political dialogue and providing logistical, security and technical support. The Mission's mandate is clear in scope: it is only authorized to support the Central African Republic's 2023 republican dialogue and local elections and no other political processes.

The United States is concerned by the announcement by the Central African Republic's Government that it is proceeding with efforts to amend the country's Constitution to end or extend term limits. It is disappointing that historic local elections, which are important for decentralization and increasing

political representation, have been deprioritized and delayed in favour of a constitutional referendum that risks destabilizing the country.

Let me be clear: the Central African Republic has the right to amend its Constitution. But we urge the Government to ensure the inclusion of diverse political and civil society actors in any potential revisions of the country's foundational document. A transparent, free and fair referendum process that reflects the will of the Central African people is critical to lasting peace and security.

Turning to the Central African Republic's sanctions regime, which the Security Council will soon negotiate, I would like to underscore the important role that the notification process plays in ensuring transparency. The arms embargo does not prevent the Central African Republic's Government from securing the weapons it needs to confront armed groups. In fact, as the Chair of the Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic explained during his visit to the Central African Republic earlier this month, the Central African Republic's Government is able to obtain all types of weapons and aircraft for the training of its armed forces. What the embargo seeks to prevent is the transfer of weapons to armed groups, which is something that has clear implications for the security of the Central African Republic. We look forward to engaging constructively with fellow Council members and the Central African Republic's Government throughout negotiations on the sanctions regime's renewal.

Finally, as we have seen over the course of the past dry season, there is no military-only solution to the Central African Republic's crisis. The only durable solution is through political dialogue, including full and inclusive implementation of the 2019 Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and the regionally brokered 2021 road map. Unfortunately, some predatory entities in the Central African Republic continue to destabilize the country, threaten the peace process and undermine the Central African Republic's sovereignty in order to further exploit Central African wealth for their own gain.

Reporting by the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic clearly indicates that Wagner Group forces, referred to as "Russian instructors", are not only engaged in indiscriminate and brutal combat

operations, but are expanding their control of the Central African Republic's natural resources, forcing out legitimate businesses in the process. For example, the Panel's report issued in May (see S/2023/360) notes that those so-called Russian instructors have occupied the premises of a Central African diamond-buying company in Bria for over a year without the company's consent.

We also remain gravely concerned by the Wagner Group and the Government forces preventing MINUSCA's unfettered freedom of movement to protect civilians and investigate human rights violations. Reporting over the past year by the Independent Expert on the Central African Republic, Yao Agbetse, further underscores the brutal human rights abuses that the Wagner Group forces are inflicting on Central African civilians and Government officials, including killings, sexual violence and other physical abuse. Without accountability for those heinous acts, the Central African Republic will not be able to achieve the peace that is necessary to unlock the country's vast potential.

The United States remains committed to the Central African people and to ensuring justice for the crimes committed against them. We again call upon all actors to lay down their weapons and choose the path of dialogue in order to achieve a long-delayed sustainable peace.

Ms. Dautllari (Albania): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Rugwabiza for her briefing. I also thank the UN-Women Executive Director, the African Union Commissioner and the civil society representative for their insights. I welcome the participation of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic to this meeting.

Allow me to make three points.

First, Albania is gravely concerned about the humanitarian situation in the country, which is worsened by the Sudanese conflict and leading to an increased number of refugees and returnees. We are also disappointed to see that the challenges to humanitarian access persist in combination with the continuing threats to civilians, movement and safety owing to the activities of armed groups. We encourage the authorities to push towards increasing access to justice for victims, including those of sexual violence, so that they may come forward without fear and to initiate swift and comprehensive investigations into human rights violations.

As mentioned in the report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic covering the most recent reporting period (see S/2023/360), the Wagner Group is responsible for grave human rights violations, non-compliance with notifications requirements and unilateral occupation of the premises of a private diamond company.

Secondly, Albania is encouraged by the efforts of the Government to revitalize the peace process while harmonizing the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic and the Luanda road map. The decentralization of the peace process is a step forward towards a much-needed inclusive environment and the de-escalation of the conflict through dialogue with emphasis on the continuation of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process.

Albania welcomes the electoral preparation and the signing of the integrated elections security plan. Nevertheless, we are concerned about the call for a constitutional referendum and about the postponement of the preparations of the local elections. We call on the Government to ensure the inclusivity and transparency of that process, thus engaging with opposition and civil society, which would provide credibility and broad consensus to the process. In addition, we echo the call of the Secretary-General on political leaders to refrain from actions, including hate speech and incitement to violence, which could undermine progress and the implementation of the Political Agreement.

Thirdly, Albania appreciates the continuous engagement of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), its renewed cooperation with the authorities and that dynamic response in bringing stability. We hope that relationship will deepen and include solutions to the challenges that MINUSCA is facing, namely, maintaining respect for the status-of-forces agreement and ensuring that the Mission can make full use of its aerial capacities.

Lastly, we appreciate the quick response and measures taken by the Mission on the latest case of sexual exploitation and abuse, in line with the commitment to zero tolerance of such incidents and the resolution 2272 (2016). No one should be immune to accountability.

The President: I shall now make a statement in my capacity as the representative of the United Arab Emirates.

I would like to thank Special Representative Rugwabiza and Commissioner Adeoye for their comprehensive briefings. I would also like to thank Executive Director Bahous for highlighting the situation of women and girls in the Central African Republic, as well as Mr. Rhosyns Ngatondang for providing us with his first-hand insights. Additionally, I welcome the participation of Ms. Baipo Temon, Foreign Minister of the Central African Republic, as well as the representatives of regional States in this meeting.

Today's briefing reminds us of the important gains achieved thus far, as well as the need to continue support for the implementation of the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic in order to sustain disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration efforts and security sector reform programmes. In that context, I would like to address three key points today.

First, we must ensure security if we are to see lasting peace and stability in the Central African Republic. The security situation there is of significant concern. The proliferation of armed groups, the use of explosive ordnance and the illicit exploitation of natural resources all underline the need to redouble our efforts and strengthen existing regional arrangements to help de-escalate tensions, address instability and secure peace. Tackling the problem of armed groups is a prerequisite for sustaining political efforts. We reiterate how important it is to have a ceasefire that is respected by all parties, as well as strengthened bilateral and multilateral mechanisms with neighbouring countries, as the recent joint operation with Chad demonstrated. The recent visit to the country by the Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013) concerning the Central African Republic provided Council members with an opportunity to better understand the progress made across the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration efforts, security-sector reform and other key areas, as well as to appreciate first-hand the commendable work of peacekeepers and other stakeholders on the ground.

Secondly, against that backdrop, there is an urgent need to address the ongoing humanitarian challenges in the country. Nearly three quarters of the population of the Central African Republic face daunting

economic and humanitarian challenges, including food insecurity. The situation of displaced persons remains a pressing concern, especially in the light of recent developments in neighbouring countries. We encourage the Central African Republic, the region and all humanitarian stakeholders to coordinate collectively to facilitate humanitarian access and ensure the safety of humanitarian actors. Likewise, the manifestations of climate and ecological change, among other overlapping factors, continue to aggravate the humanitarian and security situation and further fuel communal tensions. The reduced rainfall throughout the region has brought changes in transhumance corridors, which in turn fuel tensions and exacerbate violence. In order to address the impact of those issues on security, we encourage integrating a climate-sensitive approach within the context of the Central African Republic that enhances the incorporation of climate-related data and information into risk mitigation and management strategies. In that regard, we commend the efforts of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) to increase its use of renewable energy sources. The Council would also benefit from updates on the impact of climate change on peace and security in the Central African Republic.

Thirdly, we must safeguard the gains made in cooperation with MINUSCA. We are encouraged by the continued constructive cooperation between the Central African Republic and the Mission. The protection of civilians remains a fundamental priority, and we value the crucial role of Ms. Rugwabiza and MINUSCA in bolstering the country's security capabilities. Maintaining support for efforts to strengthen institutions and sustain the extension of State authority is key, including support for the preparation of inclusive elections. We are also encouraged by the efforts to incorporate gender-responsive approaches and initiatives that are aimed at including women in conflict management and working to reduce community violence. In line with our commitment to the women and peace and security agenda, we believe that there is a need to continue supporting women's economic participation and leadership training to adequately address the problem of conflict-related sexual violence and strengthen their participation in the peace process. We echo the Secretary-General in condemning any form of sexual exploitation or abuse and reaffirm our commitment to a zero-tolerance policy.

In conclusion, the United Arab Emirates continues to support all steps aimed at helping the people of the Central African Republic achieve their aspirations for security, stability and prosperity. We must make every effort possible to bolster those initiatives as the country makes strides towards peace.

I now resume my functions as President of the Council.

I call on the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Francophonie and Central Africans Abroad of the Central African Republic.

Ms. Baipo Temon (Central African Republic) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I would like to begin by congratulating you, Sir, on the United Arab Emirates' presidency of the Security Council and commend you for your able leadership today. On behalf of the Government and the people of the Central African Republic, I would like to warmly greet everyone here today and express our sincere thanks for their support for the cause of the Central African Republic. I also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for her presentation of the report of the Secretary-General (S/2023/442), the Executive Director of UN-Women for her briefing on the situation of women and girls in the Central African Republic, the Head of Association Jeunesse en Marche pour le Développement en Centrafrique for his call for peace in Central African Republic and his Association's contribution to countering hate speech, and all the Ambassadors and representatives here today who spoke to express their support, solidarity, compassion and encouragement, as well as their concerns.

As before, it is a moral duty and a true honour for me to take the floor in this Chamber on behalf of my country, the Central African Republic, as the Security Council considers the report of the Secretary-General on political and security developments in the Central African Republic. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate to Secretary-General Guterres the gratitude of my Government and people for his tireless commitment to peace, stability and development in the world in general and the Central African Republic in particular.

With regard to the Secretary-General's report, I would first like to say how pleased I am by the acknowledgement of the significant efforts of the Government of the Central African Republic. The report is commendable. Even if it contains a few inaccuracies and inconsistencies, unlike its predecessors it reflects

the progress that has been made. It is important to note that since the return to constitutional order with the accession to the executive of His Excellency Mr. Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Republic and Head of State, the Government has continued to make every possible effort for a definitive return to peace, strengthening the rule of law, restoring State authority throughout the country, preserving democratic gains and improving our co-existence, with the goal of stabilizing the country so that we can create the conditions necessary for its development. Those efforts have been made with the support of the international community through the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), of the African continent through the African Union, of the subregion through organizations such as the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) and the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), and all the bilateral, technical and financial partners of the Central African Republic.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the international community and MINUSCA for their strong support, improved coordination and the results achieved, and the African Union, especially the three non-permanent members of the Security Council — Gabon, Ghana and Mozambique — for their outstanding efforts in championing the cause and voice of their sister Central African Republic within the Security Council, while effectively living up to the founding principles of our continental African community aimed at defending the interests of Africa and its member States in the face of the strategic challenges that we represent on the international stage. My thanks also go to the AU Peace and Security Council, for its communiqué in support of the Central African Republic's legitimate demands, as well as the AU Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security, the AU Panel of the Wise and, as I said, various subregional organizations such as the ICGLR and ECCAS for their strong support for the political process for peace in the Central African Republic.

On the security front — and excuse me, Mr. President, for this lengthy statement — significant progress has been made. The Government remains committed to its decentralization policy, having restored State authority to about 85 per cent of the country's territory. I am pleased to be able to say that the security situation has improved. Nevertheless, it

remains volatile and therefore unpredictable owing to the growing zeal of enemies of peace such as armed groups and the various political actors or civilian proxies who continue to use weapons, disinformation and incitement to hatred and division in their refusal to adhere to the political process for peace and stability in the Central African Republic.

The improvement in the security situation should be encouraged and commended. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the combined work of the Government, led by Mr. Félix Moloua, Prime Minister and Head of Government, and guided by President Touadera, with the support of MINUSCA, the Russian Federation and Rwanda. Nor should I forget the technical and financial partners who support us in our officer-training programmes and disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration programme, including, to name only a few, the United States of America, the World Bank and the European Union, in particular in the context of its mission to advise our internal security forces, the European Union Advisory Mission in the Central African Republic.

The Central African Republic's political and security challenges are numerous and complex. First, there are the negative consequences of the many military and political crises the country has seen, which have plunged it into a state of chronic instability fuelling the precarious situation and the people's poverty, both easily manipulated in such conditions. The armed groups carry out sporadic attacks and incursions and use the profits from their illicit exploitation of the rich resources in our soil to facilitate their crimes with increasingly sophisticated weapons, all acquired with the full knowledge of the international community and in particular of the Security Council, which is struggling to address the real problem in the Central African Republic. That problem is the source providing those weapons to the armed groups living in the bush. Their supply channel for heavy and state-of-the-art weapons, as well as anti-personnel mines, should be a cause for concern in more ways than one. Considering that no country bordering the Central African Republic is an arms manufacturer, the supply network for the weapons being used to massacre the people of the Central African Republic should first and foremost be a focus of investigation by the Council and the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. The continued determination of armed groups stems from

the fact that they are able to freely ensure that supply without hindrance.

In addition to the Central African Republic's internal challenges, the country is also landlocked, leaving it vulnerable to cross-border challenges. It should not be forgotten that the Central African Republic shares borders with six States, in a subregion that is prone to armed conflict and illicit arms trafficking. The negative repercussions of crises outside the Central African Republic are a real concern for our Government, particularly the resurgence of armed tensions in the Sudan, whose worrisome humanitarian and security consequences are extremely alarming, because the growing security challenges along our borders, especially with Chad and the Sudan, encourage the rebel activity in our country.

In the face of all those security challenges, the Government is continuing its efforts to strengthen bilateral and subregional cooperation, including through joint initiatives and actions where necessary, such as its recent action taken with Chad to disband an armed movement seeking to use the Central African Republic as a rear base to destabilize our brother nation of Chad. The bilateral and subregional discussions that we participate in are continuing. Given the scope of the work to be carried out, we prefer direct discussions, in the form of political consultations, to mixed commissions, which are cumbersome to organize. Besides that, the Government and MINUSCA should continue their coordinated efforts, which are now bearing fruit, in order to be even more effective in restoring State authority throughout the country.

That is why it is important to remember that we must work rigorously together, not to maintain a peace that we have not yet established but to establish peace through a policy that can consolidate our joint efforts and stabilize the gains we have made. Overall, the aim is to implement a comprehensive programme that takes into account the needs relative to security and their consolidation through the concomitant establishment of basic services and an economic development programme that promotes the potential of the regions concerned. The efforts undertaken in Sam Ouandja must therefore be pursued and supported so that — given the vastness of the Central African Republic's territory and its needs in terms of road infrastructure development and urbanization — we can provide the population with concrete answers through coordinated, organized and structured work.

In the face of the ongoing assaults of the armed groups, we need greater coordination in order to avoid complaints of misunderstandings, including those described in the Secretary-General's report. The Government is still waiting to hear more details in that regard to enable it to address certain misunderstandings that could be resolved by simple communication. Let us not forget that it is the situation on the ground that dictates events, and that the violations observed on both sides can be improved only through full cooperation. I would like to stress the need for the Council to support the efforts undertaken by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General by ensuring that MINUSCA has a truly robust mandate and more effective rules of engagement.

On the political front, the Central African Republic is continuing its efforts to take ownership of the shared political process for peace and reconciliation. The initiatives undertaken following the recognition of the Luanda road map and the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic are now being extended into rural areas and throughout the country through an information and awareness-raising campaign led by decentralized bodies and local players. The Prime Minister continues to coordinate the various components of the process. A national border security policy has been approved. Technical subcommissions have been set up and others are being organized. Major joint commissions have been scheduled to review the outcomes of the technical subcommissions' activities.

The follow-up committee for the republican dialogue is now operational, and the Government is continuing to develop its useful existing frameworks to foster a continuing dialogue aimed at resolving differences among Central Africans. The disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration programme, although underfunded, continues to make significant progress. Nine disarmed and demobilized armed groups have disbanded, thereby fulfilling the terms of their commitment to the Political Agreement. A process to define the criteria for identifying foreign ex-combatants is under way. We are also making efforts in terms of security-sector reform to support those actions in line with the national defence plan, and it is those outcomes that are reflected in the Secretary-General's report, which recognizes the efforts made and the results achieved. The alleged perpetrators of human rights violations, including the officers concerned, are

being prosecuted by a military tribunal on the initiative of the General Inspectorate of the Armed Forces.

The local elections scheduled for July have been postponed until September. That is due to an inadequate mobilization of funds, which has left a gap of more than \$14 million to be covered. In addition, in response to the population's desire for a new constitution, the President of the Republic has announced that a referendum will be held on 30 July. The political debates on the subject are aimed at fomenting discord about one issue, the third mandate, in order to make people forget that the referendum is the expression par excellence of the people's sovereignty and therefore of democracy. What we want to do is to consolidate the gains of our hard-won collective efforts through a solid fundamental law for a future built on a foundation that ensures that the aspirations and will of the Central African people will be fulfilled. It is important to note that the referendum process is completely separate from that of local elections, which have most certainly not been cancelled but postponed to a date that is now being set and that the National Electoral Authority will announce soon. In addition, it has been made clear that the process is being led by the Central African Government and that security is being provided by the Central African armed forces, with the support of its bilateral partners Russia and Rwanda. MINUSCA is not and will not be involved in the process.

I would like to respond to an opinion expressed today by making it clear that wanting to give people legitimacy is in no way a distraction. What is a distraction is wanting to legitimize armed groups so as to keep an entire country and its population in a state of dependence through a dialogue with its oppressors, in accordance with which countries represented in this Chamber have chosen firmness and justice without a transitional phase.

With regard to human rights violations and the fight against impunity, the Government remains committed to combating impunity. The judicial system has been strengthened. Rulings have been made and criminal proceedings held. Sixty-six arrest warrants have been issued by the Special Criminal Court. The first judicial decisions concerning compensation for victims have been handed down. Efforts are continuing to address the issues of human rights violations and sexual abuse. In addition, the Government has asked MINUSCA to ensure coordination and collaboration during expert fact-finding missions, especially in cases

of human rights violations. Similarly, the Government would appreciate being informed of investigations into allegations of human rights violations and sexual abuse committed by MINUSCA personnel or contingents. The Government is prepared to support MINUSCA in its zero-tolerance policy in order to avoid tensions such as those that followed the false allegations made against the Gabonese contingent. Its withdrawal without a temporary solution being put in place brought prejudicial sentiment against the population, which was attacked as soon as it withdrew.

The situation on the humanitarian front remains alarming, due to the drop in the mobilization of humanitarian assistance for the Central African Republic, sporadic attacks by armed groups, undermining the process of the return of displaced persons and refugees to areas subject to frequent rebel incursions, and new challenges linked to the fallout from crises in neighbouring countries, in particular the Sudan and Chad, which have brought a flood of refugees into Central African border towns. With the support of humanitarian partners, the Government is meeting those new challenges in a spirit of human and fraternal solidarity. There is an urgent need to mobilize resources to respond to the new challenges on the humanitarian front, and I therefore call on the international community for support in meeting the basic needs of vulnerable people.

On the economic and financial front, the country's economic situation remains difficult, which means that the social situation is just as worrisome and difficult. The recent approval by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) is therefore to be welcomed, and is the reason why the Government will continue to work with the IMF on the necessary reforms and continue its efforts to create the right conditions to launch the country's economic and social development. While welcoming the decision to extend the National Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan, the Government is working to define a new reference framework for mobilizing resources. The paradox represented by the difference between the country's wealth and the precariousness of its population is no longer acceptable. We call on technical and financial partners to work in accordance with the principles of equality and respect for the sovereignty of States without regard for geopolitical issues.

In addition to my points concerning developments in the political and security situation, I am pleased to be able to highlight the fact that the number of violations

of the terms of the status-of-forces agreement between the Government and MINUSCA reflects the improved collaboration between them, and I would like to congratulate the Special Representative once again on her efforts to improve the Mission's coordination of its work with the Government. I encourage MINUSCA to maintain that coordination so that our combined efforts and energies can help to secure and stabilize the Central African Republic as soon as possible, considering that the peacekeeping operation's mission is approaching its tenth anniversary. It has been 10 long years, during which our enemies have perpetrated the most heinous crimes and continue to do so. It is time for the fruits of our labour to be seen and appreciated by a population weary of the constant attacks by armed groups. In that regard, the Central African Republic reiterates the need to allocate to the Mission the necessary capacities to reduce the lethal capacity of armed groups and restore full authority to the Government so that it can lead the way in the country's reconstruction.

I want to clarify a few points and affirm the excellent cooperation between MINUSCA and the Government of the Central African Republic. The report highlights the delays in processing visas, which is one example of the need for coordinating our work. After warnings about the quality of the documents made available, a meeting between the Foreign Ministry and MINUSCA's legal department cleared up doubts that MINUSCA had not provided key information that would enable visas to be issued, specifically the dates and duration for which the visas are requested. If I am not mistaken, there are no longer any difficulties in that regard, unless visa applications are submitted on the day the applicant arrives.

It is also important to note that the Government is continuing its efforts to fight disinformation and hate speech. Nevertheless, the Central African Republic calls on its partners to work to combat all forms of hate speech and disinformation campaigns. In addition, I invite partners to pay greater attention to the authorized voices of the Central African Republic. The many challenges the country faces are deliberately amplified by harmful acts aimed at defaming, discrediting and above all creating tensions with its partners. As we are all victims of such disgusting campaigns, I urge that we stay above the fray to avoid drowning in the sea of social networks where anything and everything can be found and where the truth struggles to emerge but with time always will, in spite of it all.

My last appeal is for respecting the dignity of the Central African Republic, which it is still being denied by the continuing unjust and unproductive sanctions, including the arms embargo imposed on the Central African Republic armed forces and the political deadlock related to the Kimberley Process whereby requests have been made to extend the zones that have become compliant but where the mission for evaluating the results achieved has been slow to be organized on Central African territory. We realize that this refusal or opposition to validating newly compliant areas so as to enable the Government to start mining in those areas is purely political, indeed geopolitical, and represents yet another sanction on the Central African Republic. Nonetheless, the country is willing to receive all delegations of experts, who sometimes come looking for problems where there are none.

It should be noted that all the sanctions that are damaging to the Central African Republic are above all damaging to women and young people. I followed the Executive Director of UN-Women's briefing with interest, and I want to say that to achieve that ideal of equality between men and women, we have to begin at the beginning. In other words, we must work to provide women with an appropriate and proper education. When we provide women and young people with knowledge, we will see a better Africa.

Building a country is not a simple matter; it requires capable people. To that end, I would like to invite UN-Women to support the education of women and young people and to support the Central African Republic's call to fight against the armed groups that continue to annihilate thousands and millions of women and young girls through rape and the murder of their husbands and children. I invite UN-Women to exemplify the motto "If you educate a man, you educate an individual. If you educate a woman, you educate a nation".

Finally, I call on the international community and the Security Council and, in particular, the Republic of France, to put an end to the suffering of a country and an entire population left at the mercy of these executioners by an embargo under the guise of notification, which is hampering efforts to restructure the army of the Central African Republic.

Together, let us respect the principle enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations — the equality of nations and respect for their sovereignty. No country present here would like to have to answer to anyone else,

and that is a fundamental right that we must respect, without discrimination. The Central African Republic is available and willing to work with the Council and to make every effort to meet all the conditions, however implausible they may be.

I call on Africa through the African Union, and on our subregion through ECCAS and all its member States present here today, and on the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region, to stand alongside the Central African Republic and call, on behalf of the Central African Republic and on behalf of Africa, for an end to a penitence that has lasted too long.

The Central African Republic's inability, due to the embargo, to equip itself and reform its security sector without having to be under guardianship, is a handicap for all of Africa and, first and foremost, Central Africa.

The first duty of a sovereign State is to ensure the security of its population, a right that the Central African Republic cannot fully enjoy because of the unjust sanctions imposed on it. This much-decried injustice prevents our defence and security forces from equipping themselves to confidently carry out their noble sovereign mission of defending the integrity of the territory of the Central African Republic and protecting its very resilient population that has been left to its own devices for too long in the face of attacks and crimes by terrorist rebels heavily equipped with sophisticated military hardware.

That compelling observation compels the people of the Central African Republic to consider whether, in the end, the aim is to maintain the Central African Republic in an absurd situation of neither peace nor war, given that the groups operating in the Central African Republic are not considered to be terrorists. What is worse, these groups are legitimized by the calls for victims to engage in dialogue with their torturers. We also see the passivity of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic with regard to the activities of armed groups, particularly in terms of supplies. This situation may perhaps satisfy the selfish interests of this tiny group of armed and unarmed sponsors, both national and international.

I wish to respond to the fact that the fear of arms transfers to armed groups, in the context of the embargo, is no longer an acceptable argument. In order to carry out its sovereign mission, the armed forces of the Central African Republic must move beyond the simple objective of being trained — unless the goal is to leave

the Central African Republic in a chaotic situation and at the mercy of militias operating by proxy.

I also wish to respond to a point raised here on the Badica buying house, about which there was disinformation during the visit of the delegation of the Sanctions Committee established pursuant to resolution 2127 (2013). The Government of the Central African Republic took the time to respond, but it is apparent that the explanations were not heard. There was an express request from the management of the Badica buying house, which under threat from armed groups, expressly requested the support of the Government of the Central African Republic and bilateral partners in order to ensure their safety. It was not an instance of non-authorized or abusive use. It is important to underscore that if the work of the Panel of Experts had been effective, the situation would not have deteriorated in 2020, thereby highlighting the limits of the peacekeeping mission.

The Central African Republic will continue to appeal to all its partners, in general, and to the United Nations, in particular, in order to further consolidate peace and stabilize the Central African Republic by promoting a culture of dialogue for the benefit of its people and by taking concrete actions to achieve universal peace as a basis for the development and prosperity of the Central African Republic.

In conclusion, we urge all our friendly and brotherly countries to remain on the right side of history — on the side of the 5 million men, women and children of the Central African Republic, deprived of education, protection and well-being, on the side of the armed forces of the Central African Republic by supporting the plea for the total and definitive lifting of the arms embargo imposed on the regular forces of the Central African Republic so that they can regain their operational capacities and their dignity as peace fighters and restore the confidence and pride of the people of the Central African Republic.

May peace prevail in the world.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Angola.

Ms. Mendonça (Angola) (*spoke in Portuguese; English text provided by the delegation*): Allow me, at the outset, to congratulate you, Mr. President, and through you, the Government of the United Arab Emirates, on your assumption of the presidency of the

Security Council in the month of June and to praise the initiative of convening this important meeting on the situation in the Central African Republic.

The Summit of Heads of State and Government of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), held on 16 September 2021, adopted the joint road map for peace in the Central African Republic, better known as the Luanda road map, whose implementation by the country's authorities created a climate of greater political détente and promoted the internal republican dialogue between all the living forces of the nation. We therefore encourage the Government of the Central African Republic and all concerned parties to redouble their efforts in this national process, namely by accelerating the security sector reforms.

We are concerned, however, about the implications of the crisis in the Sudan for stability in the Central African Republic, namely the increase in armed group movement and trafficking in arms and ammunition, as well as the deterioration of the humanitarian situation due to the flow of refugees — factors that pose serious risks for the ongoing peace process in the country.

All States have the right to build institutional capacity to defend themselves against internal and external threats by equipping their defence and security forces with personnel, weapons and equipment to respond to their needs and challenges.

It was in that context that, during the Security Council meeting held on 23 June 2021 (see S/PV.8802), His Excellency Mr. João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, President of the Republic of Angola, in his capacity as Chair of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region, requested the lifting of the arms embargo against the Central African Republic in force since 2013. Subsequently, the Council adopted resolution 2648 (2022), which amended the exceptions to the arms embargo, although the country was still subject to a notification regime, which we consider to be a requirement of little practical use, since it does not contribute to combating the proliferation and the illicit supply of weapons to armed groups that threaten the peace process and stability in the Central African Republic.

The Republic of Angola supports the total lifting of the arms embargo imposed on the Central African Republic, which is a position also supported by the African Union, the Economic Community of Central

African States and the ICGLR, in order to allow the defence and security forces to be properly equipped to fully comply with their constitutional mandate to defend and protect the country and its citizens. My delegation hopes that the Council's deliberations can contribute to strengthening peace and stability in the Central African Republic.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Rwanda.

Mr. Gatete (Rwanda): I thank Special Representative of the Secretary-General Valentine Rugwabiza and the other briefers for their comprehensive briefings. I also welcome and thank the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic for her detailed statement and the Angolan Secretary of State for External Relations and the members of the Security Council for their statements.

The ongoing peace process and nation-building efforts in the Central African Republic paint a picture of optimism. Although challenges still lie ahead, we firmly believe they are not insurmountable, especially considering the hardships the country faced just a few years ago. Rwanda sincerely thanks the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) and all the stakeholders involved, including the Government of the Central African Republic, the national armed forces, bilateral forces, regional organizations and development partners, for their valuable contributions.

The protection of civilians against hostile armed groups is the result of efficient coordination and collaboration between stakeholders. However, this achievement is not without its challenges. Recent reports indicate a growing concern about armed groups targeting isolated national defence posts and ambushing peacekeeping patrols. The dynamic evolution of militia tactics, the growing intricacies of their activities and alliances, and the innovative use of digital technology for improvised explosive ordinance call for a strong and proactive response from our end. More alarmingly, intelligence is pointing towards an active market for lethal equipment within the region. Meanwhile, the Government of the Central African Republic is struggling against the constraints imposed by the ongoing arms embargo.

The security challenges mentioned just now pose a significant threat to the hard-earned progress in implementing the road map to peace as well as

peacebuilding initiatives. It is therefore essential to lift the arms embargo imposed on the Government of the Central African Republic to allow it to reassert State authority nationwide.

As a significant contributor to multilateral and bilateral forces in the Central African Republic, Rwanda maintains that the conditions that warranted the arms embargo are no longer applicable. A lifting of the embargo on the Government of the Central African Republic would serve as a potent symbol of the international community's trust, solidarity and support, which is what the Government of the Central African Republic hopes to receive from the Security Council.

Investment in peace and security is not just about arms and sanctions but also about nurturing the nation's socioeconomic fabric. If we consolidate resources for investment in Central African Republic, it will foster self-sufficiency and ensure sustainable peace and security. Rwanda therefore extends a call to action to the international community, international financial institutions and development partners and asks for their valuable support. Such partnerships will enhance development in education, health care, infrastructure and capacity-building, which will contribute to the Central African Republic's resilience and economic development.

As I conclude, let me emphasize once again that the circumstances that justified the imposition of the arms embargo are no longer relevant, considering the ongoing progress in the Central African Republic. While sanctions may be needed in specific situations, it is essential to continually assess their overall impact on peace processes and carefully examine whether their consequences outweigh their advantages.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Equatorial Guinea.

Mr. Ndong Mba (Equatorial Guinea) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would like to congratulate Ms. Valentine Rugwabiza, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Central African Republic and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) for her excellent work and for her briefing.

I am going to focus my brief statement on the important need for the Security Council to declare the lifting of the arms embargo that has weighed on the Central African Republic since 2013. Indeed, there

have been and continue to be many voices calling for this lifting: in January 2018, several tens of thousands of people marched through Bangui to converge at the martyrs' monument calling for the end of the embargo; on 26 September of that year, in his address to the General Assembly, Central African President Faustin Archange Touadera called for the end of the embargo (see A/73/PV.9); in the final communiqué of the twenty-second ordinary session of the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), held in Kinshasa on 25 February 2023, the Heads of State and Government expressed their solidarity with the Central African Republic and pledged to continue their advocacy at the Security Council to put an end to the arms embargo imposed on it, which is the identical position to that of the African Union, a regional organization of 54 member countries, of which 53 are States Members of the United Nations; on 23 June 2021, in his statement to the Security Council, Angolan President João Manuel Gonçalves Lourenço, in his capacity as Chair of the International Conference of the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR), called for the lifting of the arms embargo imposed on the Central African Republic (see S/PV.8802); and at that same meeting, Ambassador Bankole Adeoye, African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security also made a vibrant call for the lifting of the embargo.

What other voices must call for the lifting of the embargo for that to occur? The Central African people have called for it, the legitimate authorities of Central African Republic have called for it, the Conference of the Heads of States of ECCAS has called for it, the Chair of the ICGLR has called for it, and African Union Commissioner Bankole Adeoye has called for it.

In the face of so many legitimate requests for the elimination of the embargo, we believe that it is time for the Security Council to heed those voices and lift the arms embargo, which weighs heavily on Central Africa, so that the country can get weapons to train its armed forces and defend itself from indiscriminate attacks by armed groups using increasingly sophisticated weapons, explosives and drones. It is evident that the embargo does not affect the armed groups, which are in contact with traffickers and criminal gangs that supply them with those weapons. It is the Central African Republic that is affected. As proof of that and as indicated by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General in her statement, armed groups are

increasingly resorting to the use of explosives, drones and sophisticated weapons.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Burundi.

Mr. Sibomana (Burundi) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, my delegation congratulates the United Arab Emirates on its assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of June and takes note of the report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations (S/2023/442).

My delegation thanks Ms. Valentine Rugwabiza, the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Central African Republic and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), for her briefing and the efforts made in the search for a solution to the security crisis in the Central African Republic. We also would like to thank the briefers, namely, Commissioner Adeoye, Mr. Rhosyns Ngatondang and the Executive Director of UN-Women, and we welcome the presence of Ms. Sylvie Valérie Baipo Temon, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Francophonie and Central Africans Abroad of the Central African Republic, and of Ms. Esmeralda Mendoza, Secretary of State for External Relations of Angola.

My delegation, which, like the other countries in the region, is following developments in the security and humanitarian situation in the Central African Republic, would like to make a few observations, given Burundi's involvement in peacekeeping for several years now, evidenced by the presence of a military battalion on the ground.

The Burundian delegation is deeply concerned by the increasing presence of armed groups and of foreign mercenaries and criminals alongside them. Indeed, based on the report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic (see S/2023/360), which estimates the number of Chadian rebel groups, as well as the Janjaweed from Darfur and the Misseriya from the Sudan, to be 6,000, my delegation fully recognizes the threat posed by the rise in power of those groups, in terms of weapons and an increase in armed elements, and their strengthened collaboration with other armed groups.

In that regard, Burundi would like to strongly denounce the terrorist acts perpetrated by the Coalition of Patriots for Change, which, in applying its new

modus operandi, is committing actions that constitute serious violations of several principles of international humanitarian law. Those new modi operandi, such as the use of anti-personnel mines, the use of aircraft and drones in violation of Central African airspace to drop bombs on part of the territory, attacks on foreign business sites, summary executions of foreign nationals and hostage-taking for ransom, are well known to all for the disproportionate impact that they have on civilians and their contribution to the deterioration of the political and security situation.

The Burundi delegation also would like to strongly denounce the resurgence in attacks targeting United Nations peacekeeping forces and Central African defence and security force positions, as well as indiscriminate attacks against the civilian population and humanitarian actors. Such actions serve only to dramatically increase the number of victims and worsen the humanitarian situation in the country. Burundi would like to remind the warring parties that those actions constitute serious and flagrant violations of international law. For that reason, we call on the international community to reaffirm its support for the Central African Republic in its fight against those terrorist groups.

Burundi is following developments in the Sudan crisis very closely and is deeply concerned about its direct impact on the security situation in the Central African Republic. Indeed, that crisis is further facilitating the movement of armed combatants, as well as the trafficking in arms and ammunition, which is exacerbating the precarious security situation in the country.

Burundi is equally concerned about the worsening humanitarian situation in the country, caused by the imminent refugee crisis following the crisis in the Sudan. Consequently, Burundi advocates financial support for the humanitarian response plan for the Central African Republic launched in February 2023, and calls in particular for direct support for refugees and local host communities.

Burundi welcomes the progress made in implementing the Luanda process and the Political Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in the Central African Republic, as well as the Central African Government's success in disbanding nine armed groups in 2022 and 2023. It is essential for the international community to further support those

strong political commitments through the continued funding of disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration (DDRR).

We take this opportunity to pay special tribute to the enlightened leadership of His Excellency Faustin Archange Touadera, President of the Central African Republic, in the process of restoring peace, security, stability and democracy in the country.

Furthermore, the Burundian delegation welcomes the progress made by the Central African authorities in implementing the benchmarks set out in the statement by the President of the Security Council S/PRST/2019/3 of 9 April 2019. Burundi especially welcomes the measures and initiatives taken by the Central African Government to strengthen the arms and ammunition management system, the operationalization of the National Commission to Combat the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons, the reform of the security sector and the success of the DDRR process, which has contributed to the demobilization of 5,000 individuals while reducing the reintegration timeline by six months.

The Burundi delegation would like to underscore the joint request made by the African Union Peace and Security Council at its 1116th meeting and by the Conference of Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) at its twenty-second ordinary session. That request stresses the importance of enabling the Central Africans to fully take ownership of their destiny by authorizing them to strengthen the sovereign capability of their law enforcement agencies to enable them to effectively discharge their constitutional mandate to defend and protect the country and its citizens. Indeed, we believe that is all the more important in view of the further deterioration in the country's security situation, due to the arming and massive increase in the number of different armed groups on the national territory. In a situation where the forces of law and order do not have the means to carry out their mandate, serious, flagrant and recurrent violations of human rights and crimes against humanity will continue to be perpetrated by terrorist groups in full view of the public with an almost complete impotence of local authorities. Clearly, imposing an arms embargo on a State combating terrorism only worsens an already precarious situation.

In view of the aforementioned and in accordance with the recommendations of the ECCAS Conference

of Heads of State and Government and the request of the African Union Peace and Security Council, the Government of Burundi calls for the total, direct and unconditional lifting of the arms embargo, including the notification requirement, which was unfairly imposed on the Central African Republic.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

Mr. Nzongola-Ntalaja (Democratic Republic of the Congo) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to congratulate you, Mr. President, on your assumption of the presidency of the Security Council for the month of June, and thank you, Sir, for organizing this meeting on the situation in the Central African Republic.

I would also like to thank the other officials and dignitaries at this meeting, beginning with Her Excellency Ms. Sylvie Baipo Temon, Minister for Foreign Affairs, Francophonie and Central Africans Abroad of the Central African Republic; Her Excellency Ms. Valentine Rugwabiza, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for the Central African Republic and Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA); His Excellency Mr. Bankole Adeoye, African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security; Her Excellency Ms. Esmeralda Mendoza, Secretary of State for External Relations of Angola; Ms. Sima Sami Bahous, Executive Director of UN-Women, and the civil society representative from the Central African Republic, Mr. Rhosyns Ngatondang. I would also like to thank the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. António Guterres, for his commitment to the cause of Africa.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo follows with interest developments in the Central African Republic, a neighbouring country with which it shares more or less 1,577 km of border. That which affects the Central African Republic can affect the north-western and northern parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. I therefore have duty of solidarity in two ways: first, nationally and secondly, regionally, as a member of the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region.

Allow me to welcome the progress made in the Central African Republic in implementing the process of joint ownership of the joint road map of the Luanda process and the Political Agreement for Peace and

Reconciliation in the Central African Republic. To date, at least nine armed groups out of a total of 14 signatories to the Political Agreement have been dissolved in the Central African Republic. This momentum can be maintained by strengthening the disarmament, demobilization, repatriation and reintegration (DDRR) process and by sustaining its financing.

In addition, the letter dated 15 May 2023 from Secretary-General addressed to the Security Council (S/2023/356) also highlighted further progress on the goals defined in the statement by the President of the Security Council of 9 April 2019 (S/PRST/2019/3). These are the measures taken by the Central African Republic for more effective arms and ammunition management, the operationalization of the National Commission on Small Arms and Light Weapons and the start of security sector reform, among others.

At the diplomatic level, steps have been taken to reactivate several joint commissions between the Central African Republic and its neighbours, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Those bilateral platforms will further improve coordination efforts between the Central African Republic and its neighbours in the fight against common security threats.

The realities I have just described cannot, however, sidestep the challenges and other remaining concerns, including the following.

First, there is the rise of certain refractory armed groups, which are well-equipped and receive external training, which is a cause for concern. The final report of the Panel of Experts on the Central African Republic (see S/2023/360) highlighted in this respect the Janjaweed of Darfur, the Misseriya militia of the Sudan and a number of rebels from neighbouring countries of the Central African Republic.

Secondly, the impact of the crisis in the Sudan on the Central African Republic, in particular with regard to the movements of armed combatants, and the problem of the ever-increasing number of refugees, which exacerbates the humanitarian situation, are all subjects of concern.

Before concluding, allow me to present a few of my Government's requests to the Council: first, increased Council support for national and regional peace and cooperation efforts, such as the Luanda process and the Peace Agreement; and secondly, advocacy for financing the DDRR process and humanitarian response plan

for the Central African Republic; thirdly, recognition of the recommendations of the 1116th meeting of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union, held on 31 October 2022, and the final communiqué of the twenty-second regular session of the conference of Heads of State of ECCAS. Those two decisions were confirmed by the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region.

Those three entities have thus clearly asked the Security Council, given the progress achieved and the challenges and other threats that I mentioned previously, to completely waive the notification obligation on weapons established by resolution 2648 (2022), adopted on 29 July 2022. The Democratic Republic of the Congo endorses the recommendations of the three aforementioned bodies. On the basis of its experience with the famous notification clause, the Democratic Republic of the Congo hopes that this obligation, which weighs on the brotherly country of the Central African Republic, will finally be lifted in order to strengthen the security forces of the Central African Republic as they face those multiple threats.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Congo.

Mr. Makayat-Safouesse (Congo) (*spoke in French*): First of all, Mr. President, I would like to welcome your presidency of the Council, and, at the same time, congratulate you on convening this important meeting on the Central African Republic. At this point, I would also like to welcome the presence of Her Excellency Ms. Sylvie Baipo Temon, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic.

In view of the lateness of the hour, I will confine myself to making three points and concluding with a recommendation. My first observation flows naturally from all the statements we have made. I believe that all the assessments to which we have listened, whether by the Head of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) or by the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Central African Republic, show that the country continues to face challenges that are as urgent as ever — hence the difficulty of providing a ranking of the country's priorities when it comes to a country which, like our own, remains weakened by multi-faceted economic shocks. This situation, the repercussions of which are keenly felt in certain parts of our subregion, is of the utmost concern to us. That is even more so

today, with the exacerbation of the Sudanese conflict and the activity of negative forces and other unarmed non-State groups, whose main motivation indeed continues to be predation.

My second observation is a regional one: we continue to believe that comprehensive development for our respective countries can only be achieved in a general context of lasting peace and security, both within our States and between them. That is why my country's Government encourages all efforts by the international community to promote confidence-building measures at both the regional and subregional levels.

My third observation is that, despite all the efforts by the international community, both at the level of the United Nations and through MINUSCA and other partners, all those efforts will remain in vain if they are not accompanied by those of the Central African Government, which is tirelessly committed to establishing a lasting and definitive peace. We have all witnessed the evolution of the sociopolitical and security situation in the Central African Republic. We are referring here to all the progress that has been made thanks to those efforts by the Central African Government, which are gains we must consolidate.

Finally, I would like to conclude by saying that the support of the Council is decisive in enabling the Central African Republic to play its full role in its quest for control over its territory. This is why my country would like to solemnly reiterate its call for the complete lifting of the arms embargo on the Central African Republic, with the cancellation of the notification obligation. Sanctions, as we see on a daily basis, are an obstacle to the operational capacity of the armed forces of the Central African Republic to effectively carry out their solemn duty to defend and protect their territory,

as well as to the peaceful populations already battered by so many years of violence and atrocity.

The President: The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Francophonie and Central Africans Abroad of the Central African Republic has asked for the floor to make a further statement. I now give her the floor.

Ms. Baïpo Temon (Central African Republic) (*spoke in French*): I will not be long. I would just like to reiterate once again my sincere thanks to my sisters and brothers from the Central African region, first for their presence here, and secondly for their support to our plea, because it is not the Central African Republic who is here today, it is all of Central Africa. If a State, especially a State at the heart of Central Africa, is in turmoil, it is important that all the other States stand by its side, and this is a moving sign of solidarity, for the Central African Republic. So I would like to reiterate my thanks for having been there, for supporting the plea of the Central African Republic.

I also reiterate my thanks to the three African members of the Council — Gabon, Mozambique and Ghana — and to all the participants here from States who have provided support. The Central African Republic remains available to respond to the various concerns. It remains available to continue working with the sole aim of reducing the capabilities of the enemies of peace and bringing a glimmer of hope to an entire people who for years have been under the tyranny of other men.

The President: There are no more names inscribed on the list of speakers.

Before adjourning this meeting, I would like to thank the interpreters for remaining with us until this time.

The meeting rose at 1.10 p.m.